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Hitler's Racial Ideology: Content and Occult Sources

by Jackson Spielvogel and David Redles

In a 1931 interview with a Leipzig newspaper editor, Adolf Hitler made a passionate declaration of the true significance of his National Socialist movement:

The Frenchman Gobineau and the Englishman Chamberlain were inspired by our concept of a new order—a new order, I tell you, or if you prefer, an ideological glimpse into history in accordance with the basic principle of the blood. We do not judge by merely artistic or military standards or even by purely scientific ones. We judge by the

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spiritual energy which a people is capable of putting forth, which will enable it in ten years to recapture what it has lost in a thousand years of warfare. I intend to set up a thousand year Reich and anyone who supports me in battle is a fellow-fighter for a unique spiritual-I would almost say divine-creation. At the decisive moment the decisive factor is not the ratio of strength but the spiritual force employed. Betrayal of the nation is possible even when no crime has been committed, in other words when a historical mission has not been fulfilled.¹

This statement by Hitler gives rise to several intriguing questions. What was the "basic principle of the blood" which inspired Hitler's "new order"? What did he mean by the "spiritual energy" of the people and how was it connected to their blood? Why did Hitler envision his movement as generating a "spiritual" and even "divine creation" that would fulfill a "historic mission"? What was the relationship between "the basic principle of the blood" and Hitler's fanatical hatred of Jews? And finally, what were the sources of these ideas, assuming of course that Hitler was influenced by the philosophies of others? Is it possible that occult or esoteric racial philosophy may, in fact, have been one of the major sources for Hitler's racial ideology? In this paper we shall attempt to provide some answers to these questions.

It is evident from Mein Kampf and Hitler's speeches that he viewed racial conflict as the determining factor in all of human history. "The racial question gives the key not only to world history, but to all human culture."² Race was not simply a political issue to be used to curry the favor of the masses, but the "granite foundation"³ of Hitler's ideology.

Hitler's racial ideology stemmed from what he called "the basic principle of the blood." This meant that the blood of every person and every race contained the soul of a person and likewise the soul of his race, the Volk. Hitler believed that the Aryan race, to which all "true" Germans belonged, was the race whose blood (soul) was of the highest degree. God Himself had, in fact, created the Aryans as the most perfect men, both physically and spiritually.⁴

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Since the blood (soul) of the Aryans contained specific spiritual energies, the "cultural energies" or "racial primal elements,"⁵ as Hitler often called them, the Aryans supplied the culture that creates the beauty and dignity of higher humanity. In other words, all that man calls higher culture was ultimately the product of the spiritual and creative energies that exist in the blood of the Aryans. Hitler stated:

All the human culture, all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan. This very fact admits of the not unfounded inference that he alone was the founder of all higher humanity, therefore representing the prototype of all that we understand by the word "man." He is the Prometheus of mankind from whose bright forehead the divine spark of genius has sprung at all times.... Exclude him- -and perhaps after a few thousand years darkness will again descend on the earth, human culture will pass, and the world turn to a desert.⁶

Human culture and civilization on this continent are inseparably bound up with the presence of the Aryan. If he dies out or declines, the dark veils of an age without culture will again descend on this globe.⁷

Indeed, this dying-off of the Aryans was what Adolf Hitler perceived as happening around him.

Germany's loss of World War I and subsequent economic problems were the visible contemporary evidence of Aryan decline. This descent occurred by the original sin of blood poisoning, or the contamination of the Aryan blood (soul) by an inferior race:

The Aryan gave up the purity of his blood and, therefore, lost his sojourn in the paradise which he had made for himself. He became submerged in the racial mixture, and gradually, more and more, lost his cultural capacity, until at last, not only mentally but also physically, he began to resemble the subjected aborigines more than his own ancestors.... Thus cultures and empires collapsed to make place for new formations. Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures; for men do not perish as a result of lost wars, but by the loss of that force of resistance which is contained only

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in pure blood. All who are not of good race in this world are chaff.⁸

The "serpent" that brought about the contamination of pure Aryan blood was, of course, the Jew. "The mightiest counterpart to the Aryan is represented by the Jew."⁹ To Hitler, the Jews were, of course, not members of a particular religious creed, but a specific race:

The Jew has always been a people with definite racial characteristics and never a religion; only in order to get ahead he early sought for a means which could distract unpleasant attention from his person. And what would have been more expedient and at the same time more innocent than the "embezzled" concept of a religious community? For here, too, everything is borrowed or rather stolen. Due to his own original special nature, the Jew cannot possess a religious institution, if for no other reason because he lacks idealism in any form, and hence belief in a here-after is absolutely foreign to him. And a religion in the Aryan sense cannot be imagined which lacks the conviction of survival after death in some form.¹⁰

From Hitler's perspective the Jewish race was not created by God as one of the original root races of mankind and was, in his mind, un-Godly, inhuman, the embodiment of all that was evil. Hence the Jew " . . . stops at nothing, and in his vileness he becomes so gigantic that no one need be surprised if among our people the personification of the devil as the symbol for all evil assumes the living shape of the Jew."¹¹ The goal of the Jews was the domination of the world, a task that could be achieved by the poisoning of Aryan blood. Hitler contended that the Jews used a variety of methods to accomplish this task. The most blatant was miscegenation, accomplished by Jewish "rape" of Aryan girls and Jewish importation of Blacks into Germany in order to further destroy Aryan purity and carry out this kind of "disarming" of the spiritually leading class "of his racial adversaries."¹²

To Hitler, the Jewish race was also attempting to poison the Aryan blood (soul) by utilizing social methods, such as cultural and political means. The Jew was the fundamental cause of the decadence that Hitler saw in modern art and literature. To

Hitler, Jewish modern art was a deliberate attempt to infect the unconsciousness or inner self of the Aryan people. "Culturally he contaminates art, literature, the theater, makes a mockery of natural feeling, overthrows all concepts of beauty and sublimity, of the noble and the good, and instead drags men down into the sphere of his own base nature."¹³

But it is in the area of politics that Hitler perceived the greatest Jewish threat to the Aryan race. Jewish infiltration of the bourgeoisie had made the latter puppets for the execution of the Jewish plan for world domination. Thus the bourgeois economic institution of capitalism and the political institutions of liberalism, democracy, parliamentarianism, freedom of the press, and internationalism were all Jewish instruments creating disorder in the world as a stepping stone to domination.¹⁴

By far the most powerful political tool of the Jewish race, however, was Marxism. Marxism was a rival Weltanschauung that created a "view of life" directly hostile to everything in which Hitler believed. Marxism, to Hitler, maintained that the state had in itself the "creative, culture-forming force,"¹⁵ meaning that the state created a nation's culture out of economic necessities. In Hitler's view, the state could not create a nation's culture. Since the nation was the outward manifestation of a race's (Volk's) inner nature of soul, the state then could only be the instrument by which a race could express its cultural energies. The state's primary function was to preserve and promote those Aryan culture-creating spiritual elements that existed in the blood of the Aryan race.

The state is a means to an end. Its end lies in the preservation and advancement of a community of physically and psychically homogeneous creatures. This preservation itself comprises first of all existence as a race and thereby permits the free development of all the forces dormant in this race.... Thus, the highest purpose of a folkish state is concern for the preservation of those original racial elements which bestow culture and create the beauty and dignity of a higher mankind. We, as Aryans, can conceive of the state only as the living organism of a nationality which not only assures

the preservation of this nationality, but by the development of its spiritual and ideal abilities leads it to the highest freedom.¹⁶

Hitler also deplored Marxism for its belief in racial equality. Obviously racial inequality and Aryan domination did not permit such misunderstanding of the role of race in history. Likewise, Hitler denounced Marxism's levelling egalitarianism, which he felt destroyed the natural principle of inequality and the consequent domination of some individuals (an elite) over others.¹⁷

Hitler saw the Marxist threat to Aryan culture-creating ability not as coincidental but as a deliberate plan to destroy culture, bring civilization into chaos, and enable the Jews to achieve their goal of world domination. To Hitler, "the Jew Karl Marx" knew precisely what policies would lead to world chaos.

Actually Karl Marx was only the one among millions who, with the sure eye of the prophet, recognized in the morass of a slowly decomposing world the most essential poisons, extracted them, and, like a wizard, prepared them into a concentrated solution for the swifter annihilation of the independent existence of free nations on this earth. And all this in service of his race.¹⁸

In conjunction with his racial ideology and antisemitism, Hitler often spoke of an "historic" or "higher mission" of the Aryan race and its elite core, the German people. The Aryans, according to Hitler, were once rulers of the earth, the highest race of mankind, endowed with the highest degree of spiritual qualities and the only ones capable of producing a higher civilization.¹⁹ Aryans were, in essence, god-men on earth, but through blood poisoning lost their ruling position. However, as its "higher mission," the German people were destined to regain this position for the Aryan race. To do so, Germany must restructure its political and social foundations and create a state whose function was to promote the Aryan culturecreating "spiritual elements" that exist in the blood of the German race. If this were done, racially and thus spiritually pure human beings could be produced, ensuring Aryan world domination.²⁰

But if this Aryan destiny were to be fulfilled, Hitler believed, one major obstacle would have to be

dealt with-the Jew. The Jew was the poisoner of the blood (soul) of the Aryan race, thus inhibiting its spiritual growth and endangering its divine destiny. Since Hitler saw all Jewish actions as racially and thus spiritually motivated, it became his divine mission to create an Aryan spiritual movement to combat the Jewish race.²¹ Hitler believed that his Nazi party, founded as a spiritual movement, would successfully rise to German political dominance since it was based in his mind on eternally true ideals rooted in the very soul of the Aryan race.²² Once in power, the Nazi movement could then create a state that would foster the historic destiny of the Aryan race. And the first task of this Aryan state would be to eliminate the Jewish threat.²³ This is why Hitler's political career both began and ended with a warning against the Jewish danger. In a letter dated 16 September 1919, called "the first piece of writing of Hitler's political career," Hitler was quite clear about his motives: the "ultimate goal [of a rational antisemitism] must unalterably be the elimination of the Jews altogether."²⁴ At the very end of his career, when he wrote his political testament to the German people, his preoccupation with the Jewish threat was still uppermost in his mind: "Above all, I bind the leadership of the nation and those under them to a meticulous observance of the racial laws and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoners of all peoples, international Jewry."²⁵ The final solution of the "Jewish question," namely, the genocide of the Jewish race in Europe, takes on its proper significance as the final, logical product of Hitler's racial ideology. Once the Jew was purged from Europe, Germany would be able to produce pure Aryans who would be physically and spiritually perfect human beings. And thus Hitler's new order would be established with spiritually pure Aryans, demigod rulers, who, as Hitler enigmatically expressed it, "having achieved possession of this earth, will have a free path for activity in domains which will lie partly above it and partly outside it."²⁶

This last statement is a reminder that Hitler suggested on occasion that there was a deeper, cosmic significance to his new order. "National Socialism," he once exclaimed to Otto Strasser, "would be worth nothing if it were restricted merely

to Germany and did not seal the supremacy of the superior Race over the entire world for at least a thousand to two thousand years."[27](#) Even in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler hinted that such a master race would have to make "the last and greatest decisions on this earth."[28](#) Are these statements the fanciful flights of words of one who was accustomed to lack of proportion and moderation? Or are they the reflection of some of the sources that influenced the development of Hitler's ideas on racial ideology?

So much has been written about the sources for Hitler's racial ideology and other ideas that the standard histories of the Third Reich and the numerous biographies of Adolf Hitler seem content to repeat a well established litany of people and movements that may have influenced Hitler's thought. Indeed, the composer Richard Wagner, the philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, the Viennese politicians George von Schonerer and Karl Lueger, the racial philosophers Joseph Arthur Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, extreme nationalism, Social Darwinism, and racism in general are all regularly cited as his main sources.[29](#) Since Hitler rarely specified his sources, scholars have resorted to indicating similarities and parallels in order to document these influences.[30](#) The suggestion made in the 1950s by Joachim Besser and in the early 1960s by George Mosse that an examination of the impact of occult or esoteric philosophies, especially current in Vienna and Munich in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on Hitler and early National Socialism might indeed be a more fruitful line of approach to the problem, has not been widely pursued by academic historians.[31](#) Recently, however, Jeffrey Goldstein and James Webb have emphasized the importance of occultism in general in the emergence of Nazi ideology.[32](#) We would like to argue that occult or esoteric racial philosophy may, indeed, have been one of the major sources for Hitler's racial ideology.[33](#)

Hitler himself may have been partly responsible for leading historians away from investigating esoteric influences.[34](#) It is well known that Hitler criticized occultists, Freemasons, and astrologers and even

persecuted some of them when he came into power. And yet, in his nightly monologues to his assembled guests, Hitler revealed his belief in the very ideas that these groups were perpetrating. Ample evidence of this is provided in his references to reincarnation, the lost continent of Atlantis, and Hans Horbiger's world ice theory, as well as in his conviction that the early myths and legends of cosmic disasters and struggles between giants and gods are actually mankind's vague memory of a disaster that destroyed a humanity that already possessed an advanced degree of civilization.³⁵

A large variety of occult or esoteric groups and philosophies existed in German-speaking lands from the 1890s into the 1920s. One of the most influential schools of thought came out of the work established by the Russian Helena Blavatsky.³⁶ Blavatsky, who had immersed herself deeply in esoteric spiritual beliefs from all over the world, formed a universal esoteric philosophy which she called Theosophy (Wisdom of the Gods). She viewed it as the revival of an ancient, occult knowledge derived from an earlier, advanced civilization which had known a unity between science and religion. In 1875, Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Olcott founded the Theosophical Society in New York City. Its purpose was to collect and diffuse this previously secret knowledge of the laws governing the universe. After the establishment of the first Theosophic lodge in 1884 in Germany, the movement spread rapidly in that country.

In her esoteric work, especially *The Secret Doctrine*, originally published in 1888, Blavatsky emphasized the concept of races as paramount in the development of human history. According to Blavatsky, there are seven root races of mankind, with each root race containing seven sub-races. The present root race is the fifth, the Aryan, and was preceded by the fourth or Atlantean race. The Aryans evolved from the fifth sub-race of the Atlanteans. According to Blavatsky, "The Aryan Race was born and developed in the far North, though after the sinking of the Continent of Atlantis its tribes emigrated further south into Asia."³⁷ The Aryans, following a migratory pattern that went south and west from Asia, ultimately created the

great Hindu, Persian, Greco-Roman, and later European cultures. Hitler, like his party ideologist, Alfred Rosenberg, also claimed Aryan origins for all of these cultures.[38](#)

Each root race is seen by Blavatsky as being constituted differently in a physical and spiritual sense. In the earliest times man was purely spirit. Then at some point in time, this spirit entered and animated physical matter.[39](#) Man thus evolved, in Blavatsky's cosmology, from the ethereal to the material. The original spirituality of man can be seen, according to Blavatsky, in the fact that mankind once was endowed with psychic powers, which she attributed to the so-called "Cyclopean eye."[40](#) With the "Cyclopean eye" man had "spiritual sight," the ability to perceive subtle realities of the spiritual world, and thus could "see" into the future and read minds. Blavatsky felt that as man evolved materially and intellectually this "Third Eye" atrophied to what is now the pineal gland and man mostly lost his psychic powers.[41](#) But, stated Blavatsky, mankind is destined to regain these abilities. That Hitler was well versed in these racial peculiarities is demonstrated in one of Herman Rauschning's conversations with Hitler:

The pursuit of the "random path of the intelligence," we learned, was the real defection of man from his divine mission. To have "magic insight" was apparently Hitler's idea of the goal of human progress. He himself felt that he already had the rudiments of this gift. He attributed to it his success and his future eminence. A savant of Munich ... had also written some curious stuff about the prehistoric world ... about forms of perception and supernatural powers. There was the eye of Cyclops, or median eye, the organ of magic perception of the Infinite, now reduced to a rudimentary pineal gland. Speculations of this sort fascinated Hitler, and he would sometimes be entirely wrapped up in them. He saw his own remarkable career as a confirmation of hidden powers. He saw himself as chosen for superhuman tasks, as the prophet of the rebirth of man in a new form.[42](#)

Might this "new form" of man of Hitler's be related to Blavatsky's root race schema? She maintained that the sixth and seventh root races would witness a return to the earlier spiritual state of

existence. Man would once again have spiritual insight and be at one with the forces of nature. According to Hitler, "Creation is not yet at an end.... Man has clearly arrived at a turning point.... A new variety of man is beginning to separate out." Hitler further believed that mankind would evolve into two distinct types. "The two types will rapidly diverge from one another. One will sink to a sub-human race and the other rise far above the man of today. I might call the two varieties the god-man and the mass-animal." The new, godlike Aryan would rule over the inferior races, the "mass-animal."⁴³ To Hitler, it was the divine mission of the Nazi movement to bring this about: "Those who see in National Socialism nothing more than a political movement know scarcely anything of it. It is more even than a religion: it is the will to create mankind anew."⁴⁴ To accomplish this Hitler believed that the Nazi movement must return the Aryan to his original state, for example, oneness with Volk, "herd instinct," racial purity, and inner spirituality. If the Nazi movement was to lead the Aryan race back to its purest form, it must, Hitler felt, eliminate those factors that caused it to stray in the first place. These are the intellect, egoism, materialism, and impurity of blood. The existence of these elements was not, in Hitler's mind, an accident of Aryan evolution, but the result of the conspiratorial actions of the Jew.

It is important to observe that there are also some striking differences between Blavatsky's doctrine and Hitler's later racial ideas. Blavatsky herself did not identify the Aryan race with the Germanic peoples. And although her racial doctrine clearly entailed belief in superior and inferior races and hence could be easily misused, she placed no emphasis on the domination of one race over another. She certainly did not advocate the use of force since human racial evolution was an inevitable process that operated primarily on the basis of spiritual laws. Nevertheless, in her work Blavatsky had helped to foster antisemitism, which is perhaps one of the reasons her esoteric work was so rapidly accepted in German circles. She sharply differentiated Aryan and Jewish religion. The Aryans were the most spiritual people on earth. For them, religion was an "everlasting lodestar." For the Jews, religion was grounded on "mere calculation." They had a "religion of hate

and malice toward everyone and everything outside itself."⁴⁵ Jewish materialism and selfishness contrasted strongly with Aryan spirituality and selflessness. This dualism is dramatically echoed in Hitler in the following passage:

Two worlds face one another-the men of God and the men of Satan. The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god. He must have come from another root of the human race. I set the Aryan and the Jew over against each other; and if I call one of them a human being I must call the other something else. The two are as widely separated as man and beast. Not that I would call the Jew a beast. He is much further from the beasts than we Aryans. He is a creature outside nature and alien to nature.⁴⁶

Hitler's dualism, unlike Blavatsky's, was conceived simply as a conflict between two races: "The struggle for world domination will be fought entirely between us, between Germans and Jews."⁴⁷

If we regard these parallels between Blavatsky's esoteric thought and Hitler's racial ideology as significant, then we need to consider an additional question. What were the specific channels by which Theosophy reached or influenced Hitler? The occult revival in Germany and in Europe in general in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to a remarkable growth of Theosophic lodges as well as other occult groups.⁴⁸ But in Germany Theosophical speculation, especially on race and nature mysticism, became combined with volkisch movements that were nationalistic and antisemitic. The resulting combination of occultism, volkisch nationalism, racism, and antisemitism became known in Germany as Ariosophy. It is possible that Ariosophy provides the link between Theosophy and Hitler's racial ideology.

The leading figures of Ariosophy were two Austrian occultists, Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels. Guido von List (1848-1919) was a free-lance author who turned increasingly to mystical and occult themes in his writings. His supporters formed the Guido von List Society in Vienna in 1903. It soon became one of the leading Viennese occult groups. Its members included the well-

known Theosophist Franz Hartmann, the chief of staff of the Austro-Hungarian army, wealthy merchants in Vienna and Germany, and the affluent Munich industrialist Friedrich Wannieck, who largely financed the society. The primary purpose of the society was to circulate and perpetuate the books and ideas of List.⁴⁹

List's ideas were explicated in a series of occult books. In *Die Religio der Ario-Germanen* (The Religion of the Ario-Germans) List established the fundamental beliefs of Ariosophy. There is a life-force that pervades the universe and its mysteries could be grasped solely by people closely in tune with nature. Only the Ario-Germans were capable of this attunement since they were the most removed from modern rationalistic and materialistic society. The Jews, on the other hand, were viewed as a prime example of lower races since they were heavily involved in rationalism and materialism. In his work *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen* (The Armanen Caste of the Ario-Germans) List made proposals for an Ario-Germanic state. It would be based on the recognition of the superiority of Aryan peoples and the need for lower races to serve the higher race. Only Ario-Germans could hold leadership positions in the state, schools, professions, industry and banks, newspapers, theater and the arts. Racial laws would maintain the purity of the Ario-Germanic race by prohibiting racial intermarriage and by reserving citizenship for Ario-Germans. A new school system based on levels would reserve the highest level for the "Armanen," the Aryan leaders who were distinguished by their ability to use the occult powers of the soul to know the secrets of the ancient wisdom-religion.⁵⁰ The parallels of List's Ario-Germanic state to Hitler's Nazi state are indeed striking.

List was also interested in occult signs and symbols. In *Das Geheimnis der Runen* (The Secret of the Runes) he portrayed runes as the sacred symbols of ancient Aryan knowledge which, interpreted properly, could provide a real understanding of spiritual forces. He used the swastika, which he depicted as a fundamental occult symbol of salvation, to represent the victory of the Aryans over the lower races. Blavatsky had also considered the swastika as a powerful occult

symbol and had used it in the seal of the Theosophical Society.⁵¹ in Mein Kampf Hitler had viewed the swastika as symbolizing " . . . the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and ... the victory of the idea of creative work, which as such always has been and always will be anfi-Semific."⁵²

There can be little doubt about the close relationship between List's Ariosophy and Theosophy. Franz Hartmann, himself a prominent Theosophist, explained how List's teachings, especially on racial doctrine bore remarkable resemblance to those of Blavatsky.⁵³ The kinship between List's Ariosophy and Theosophy is also especially noticeable in Prana, a German occult monthly for applied spiritualism. It was published by the Theosophical publishing house at Leipzig and edited by Johannes Baltzli, a Theosophist who was secretary of the Guido von List Society and biographer of List. Contributors to Prana included the Theosophists Franz Hartmann and C.W. Leadbeater, and Guido von List himself. The journal's name represented the power of the sun, considered the visible symbol of God. Prana emphasized the importance of vegetarianism. It argued that the eating of meat impeded the ability to understand nature and hence the cosmic life-force. Alcohol was thought to have the same negative qualities.⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that Hitler became both a dedicated vegetarian and teetotaler by the 1920s.

Whether Hitler had a direct, personal relationship to the Guido von List Society during his years in Vienna from 1907-1913 has not been definitively established. The List Society was certainly prominent in the occult circles that stressed volkisch nationalism and antisemitism. And Hitler did emphasize in Mein Kampf that in Vienna he established "a world picture and a philosophy which became the granite foundation" of all his actions.⁵⁵ That "granite foundation" was centered in his racial ideology. Nevertheless, it is more probable that Hitler did come into direct contact with another major proponent of Ariosophy in Vienna, Lanz von Liebenfels.

Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) moved from Catholic monasticism to an involvement in

occultism, racism, and German nationalism. He came to characterize his occupation as "racial researcher, philosopher of religion and sexual mystic," all of which were consonant with various forms of occultism. He founded a quasi-religious Order of the New Templars whose primary purpose was to foster Ariosophical doctrines. He established his first New Templars castle in the Burg Werfenstein on the Danube in 1907 and proudly flew a swastika flag over it. By the 1920s he had established three more castles and a house in Salzburg as part of his Templar movement. He served as a member of the board of directors of the Guido von List Society.⁵⁶

Lanz von Liebenfels wrote a series of occult works that presented his Ariosophical philosophy, although his major work *Theozoologie* (Theozoology), written in 1904, contains the essence of his thought. That philosophy, like List's, was based on the superiority of the Ario-Germans. The Aryan was an exalted spiritual being: "The Aryan hero is on this planet the most complete incarnation of God and of the Spirit."⁵⁷ Jews, as well as other inferior races, were characterized as "animal-men" who must someday be eliminated by genetic selection, sterilization, deportations, forced labor, and even "direct liquidation." The elimination of the "animal-man" made possible the coming of the "higher new man."⁵⁸ Liebenfels also propagated his occult racial views in a magazine called *Ostara* and subtitled "Library of Those Who are Blond and Defend the Rights of the Male."⁵⁹

According to Liebenfels, there was a close affinity between Theosophy and his brand of Ariosophy. In discussing Blavatsky's work, *The Secret Doctrine*, he wrote enthusiastically that "she was almost a generation ahead of her time and of anthropology. Today for the first time work on the latest material has brought to light results which show a completely amazing identity with those of the spiritual Theosophist."⁶⁰ It was claimed by a friend that Lanz had direct contact with Blavatsky and her immediate successor as head of the Theosophical movement, Annie Besant.⁶¹

The direct impact of Lanz von Liebenfels on Hitler is by no means accepted by all historians. However, Liebenfels claimed that he had personal

contact with Hitler when the future Fiihrer visited him in 1909 to obtain some back issues of Ostara.⁶² The New Templar movement was still active during the growth of the Nazi party and Liebenfels himself made several direct assertions concerning the close relationship of his movement to Hitler's. He wrote in 1925:

Already there appear the outlines of a new Ariosophical, Ario-Christian International: Fascism in Italy, Awakening Hungary, the Spanish Fascists, the North American Ku Klux Klan and finally the Swastika movement in Germany, directly proceeding from Ariosophy.⁶³

In 1932 Liebenfels wrote to one of his New Templar brothers: "Do you know that Hitler is one of our pupils? You will still live to see that he, and thereby we, also will triumph and kindle a movement that will make the world tremble."⁶⁴ Are these statements pure fantasy? Or did Liebenfels know of Hitler's affinity to his movement?

Without new evidence it may be impossible to prove to everyone's satisfaction that Hitler was directly influenced in the development of his racial ideology by Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels. But there can be little doubt, based on the parallels found in Hitler and in both Theosophy and Ariosophy that the occult climate of Vienna in Hitler's "formative years" did have an impact on him. Hitler experienced a similar environment after the war when he returned to Munich. Postwar Germany, as one contemporary noted, was rife with occultism:

Germany seems to be gripped by an occult fever. Its victims are like drug-addicts; every new psychic fashion claims thousands of adherents and dozens of victims.... Men and women have become exhausted by the sorrows and horrors of reality; they flee to the world of imagination; the maze of everyday life enfolds them and they hope to find a way out through occultism and dreams.⁶⁵ The Bavarian capital of Munich was likewise a scene of much occult activity and Hitler had ample opportunity to experience it. In the conversation with Rauschnig quoted earlier in this paper, Hitler refers to his knowledge of a Munich occultist who had written about the "Cyclopean eye."⁶⁶ As a frequent visitor at the home of Hugo and Elsa

Bruckmann in 1922 and 1923, Hitler probably heard some of the lectures of Alfred Schuler, a disciple of Guido von List.⁶⁷ Most important, however, Hitler associated with various members of the Thule Society, an occult society that combined occult racial philosophy with a belief in militant action. Ariosophy, like Theosophy, had relied on intellectual expositions of racial evolution. The Thule Society preached Aryan supremacy and acted to achieve it. It provides the final link between occult racial theories and the racial ideology of Hitler and the emerging Nazi party.

The Thule Society was basically a continuation of the Germanen Order, whose first lodge was established in Berlin in 1912. Modeled after the organization of Freemasonry, the aims of the Germanen Order were to achieve German racial purity, attack the Jews, and establish Germans as the leaders of Europe. In 1917, Rudolf von Sebottendorf was made head of the Order's Bavarian province. In order to provide a cover for the Order's activities, he founded the Thule Society in January 1918. The Thule Society functioned outwardly as a "German Studies" group. Despite its outer appearance, it was actively involved in the counter-revolutionary forces against the Bavarian Soviet Republic, which the Thule felt was dominated by Jews.⁶⁸

In his 1933 book, *Before Hitler Came* (Before Hitler Came), Rudolf von Sebottendorf claimed that the Thule Society was of great importance to the founding of Hitler's National Socialist movement. He stated,

It was Thule people to whom Hitler first came and it was Thule people who first united themselves with Hitler. The armament of the coming Führer consisted, besides the Thule itself, of the German Workers' Society, founded in the Thule Society by brother Karl Harrer and the German-Socialist Party led by Hans Georg Grassinger, whose organ was the *Munchener Beobachter*, later the *Volkische Beobachter*. From these three sources Hitler created the National Socialist German Worker's Party.⁶⁹

Undoubtedly, Sebottendorf exaggerated his own significance.⁷⁰ There is no evidence that he and Hitler ever met. Nevertheless, the German

Worker's Party, which Hitler joined and later renamed, was founded by Anton Drexler early in 1919 under the chairmanship of Karl Harrer, a member of the Thule. In fact, the German Workers' Party had a number of close links with the Thule society. Hitler also had intimate ties with Thule members. Dietrich Eckart, whom Hitler accepted as his mentor and praised as the original father of the Nazi movement, Alfred Rosenberg, eventually the Nazi party's ideologist, and Rudolf Hess, Hitler's future second-in-command, were all members of the Thule Society. Sebottendorf's Thule Society, with its occult, racist ideas is, regardless of any exaggeration in Sebottendorf's claims, connected to the beginning of Hitler's National Socialism.

Significantly, the Thule Society was well grounded in occultist philosophy. Eckart, Rosenberg, and Hess shared occult interests. In his writings, Dietrich Eckart combined German racism, his own version of occult Christian mysticism, and a profound knowledge of Theosophy and occultism in general. Alfred Rosenberg, an intimate of Eckart, shared his mystical preoccupations. In his work, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, he developed an "occult history" of mankind based on the lost Atlantis. Rudolf Hess was especially interested in astrology and astrological prophecies and herbalist lore founded upon the occult "doctrine of correspondences." Thule's founder Rudolf von Sebottendorf was a practicing occultist. He wrote a history of Turkish Freemasonry and a history of astrology that was really a discussion of occult prehistory. He edited an astrological magazine and another called *Runen*, which was decorated with swastikas.⁷¹ According to Sebottendorf himself, the Germanen Order and Thule Society were basically dependent for their intellectual foundation on Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels. Indeed, the connection of the Thule Society to Ariosophy is evident in a headline of Thule's newspaper, the *Mfinchener Beobachter*. It read "Down with the Tschandalen," the latter being Liebenfels's name for the inferior races who faced liquidation.⁷²

This paper began with a discussion of Hitler's racial ideology and its parallels to Blavatsky's esoteric thought. Our examination of the Ariosophy

of Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels and the Thule Society described the possible channels by which Theosophical thought might have reached Hitler and helped to determine his own racial ideology. Considerably more research remains to be done to show specifically how Hitler and other Nazis came into direct contact with esoteric philosophy and more important, what the ramifications of this new information are. The lack of originality in Hitler's thought is apparent. But Hitler's true originality was his ability to translate ideas into reality. His racial ideology, derived in part from perversion of esoteric thought, did, after all, become racial genocide.

NOTES

1. Edouard Calic, *Secret Conversations with Hitler* (New York, 1971), p. 68.
2. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1943), p. 339,
3. *Ibid.*, p. 22. The general subject of Hitler's ideology has not been very thoroughly explored. The standard treatment of Hitler's world view is Eberhard Jackerl, *Hitler's Weltanschauung*, trans. Herbert Arnold (Middletown, CT, 1972). Also valuable is Heinrich Kautz, *Das zerschlagene Menschenbild: Prinzipien und Ideen zur Wirklichkeit und Ideologie des Nationalsozialismus* (Sankt Augustin, 1977). Barbara Miller Lane and Leila Rupp have edited a collection of selections from other Nazis dealing with ideology in *Nazi Ideology before 1933* (Austin, 1978). A new approach to this problem is taken in James Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution* (Stanford, 1980). His thesis that National Socialist ideology was a "more or less coherent millenarian and gnostic world view" is well argued.
4. *Mein Kampf*, pp. 327, 381 and especially 396 on blood and soul; also on God's role, see speech of 1937 in Gordon Prange, ed., *Hitler's Words* (Washington, DC, 1944), p. 80.
5. *Mein Kampf*, p. 394.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

7. Ibid., p. 383.
8. Ibid., p. 296; see also pp. 249, 286-89; and Hitler's notes for a "monumental world history" in Werner Maser, ed., *Hitler's Letters and Notes* (New York, 1974), p. 280.
9. *Mein Kampf*, p. 300.
10. Ibid., p. 306.
11. Ibid., p. 324; also see Maser, *Hitler's Letters*, p. 221, and Calic, *Secret Conversations*, p. 66.
12. *Mein Kampf*, pp. 316, 325.
13. Ibid., pp. 324, 326.
14. Ibid., pp. 91, 313, 316; especially on internationalism, see Hitler's speech of 1922 in Prange, *Hitler's Words*, pp. 73, 75-76; one of Hitler's most thorough arguments on the Jews' creation of democracy, liberalism, and parliaments is in a speech of 1922 in *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, 1922-1939*, ed. Norman H. Baynes, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1942), vol. 1, pp. 23-24.
15. *Mein Kampf*, p. 382.
16. Ibid., pp. 393-94.
17. Ibid., pp. 65, 320, 325, 382, 447; see also Hitler's speech of 28 July 1922 in Prange, *Hitler's Words*, p. 73.
18. *Mein Kampf*, p. 382.
19. Ibid., pp. 383-84, 391, 398.
20. Ibid., pp. 397-98.
21. Ibid., pp. 346, 380.
22. Ibid., pp. 351, 384.
23. Ibid., p. 338.
24. Ernst Deuerlein, "Hitlers Eintritt in die Politik und die Reichswehr," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7 (1959): 204.

25. Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932-1945*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1962-1963), vol. 2, p. 2239.
26. *Mein Kampf*, pp. 383-84.
27. Baynes, *Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, vol. 1, p. 775.
28. *Mein Kampf*, p. 427.
29. Two examples are Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, trans. Jean Steinberg (New York, 1970), pp. 7-45, 50-57, and Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny* (New York, 1962), pp. 36-46, 374, 382-85, 397-408.
30. As a good example of this approach, see R.H. Samuels, "The Origin and Development of the Ideology of National Socialism," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 9 (May 1963): 59-77.
31. Joachim Besser, "Die Vorgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus im neuen Licht," *Die Pforte* 2, no. 21-22 (Nov. 1950): 768-85. George Mosse, "The Mystical Origins of National Socialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (Jan.-Mar. 1961): 81-96 and *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York, 1964), pp. 13-51, 67-83. See also Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab* (Munich, 1958), pp. 239-40.
32. Jeffrey Goldstein, "On Racism and Anti-Semitism in Occultism and Nazism," *Yad Vashem Studies* 13 (1979): 53-72. James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle, IL, 1976), especially pp. 21-79, 275-344. Webb, p. 15, defines occultism as a term covering Spiritualism, Theosophy, Eastern cults, varieties of Christian sects, and the esoteric pursuits of magic, alchemy and astrology. Although these can be in conflict, they share one common belief, the ideal of "spiritual development."
33. It is possible that the often lurid approach seen in books produced by popular dabblers in the occult understandably drove serious historians away from such a pursuit. Examples of such "occult" Hitler studies include: Francis King, *Satan and Swastika* (St. Albans, 1976); J.H. Brennan,

Occult Reich (New York, 1974); Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny* (New York, 1973); Jean-Michel Angebert, *The Occult and the Third Reich*, trans. Lewis Sumberg (New York, 1974); and Gerald Suster, *Hitler: the Occult Messiah* (New York, 1981). These studies use the same evidence to build their arguments. Most of the evidence is circumstantial and undocumented.

34. As Reginald Phelps has shown, Hitler deliberately crushed the claim of Rudolf von Sebottendorf that the occult Thule Society was largely responsible for creating the original German Worker's Party. Reginald H. Phelps, "Before Hitler Came: Thule Society and Germanen Order," *Journal of Modern History* 35 (1963): 245-61.

35. *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941-1944*, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York, 1953), pp. 33, 67, 118, 203-04, 263. Helena Blavatsky's occult work, *The Secret Doctrine*, discussed below, contains a section entitled "Giants, Civilizations, and Submerged Continents Traced in History." It forms Section VI of *The Secret Doctrine*, 3 vols. (London, 1928), vol. 2, pp. 784-821.

36. For a modern biography see Marion Meade, *Madame Blavatsky* (New York, 1980). The best scholarly work has been done by Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 31-51.

37. Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 812. The Northern lands were the legendary Nordic homeland of Thule, a name later used by the protoNazi group, the Thule Society, which will be discussed below.

38. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 111, 278, 411, 527; Mein Kampf, pp. 264-65, 294, 393, 423; Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1934), pp. 21-35. Rosenberg begins with the Atlantis legend.

39. Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, pp. 90-94.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 307, 313.

41. Ibid., pp. 302-16.

42. Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks* (London, 1939), p. 240. Although some historians have attempted to question the content of Rauschning's conversations with Hitler, Theodore Schieder's conclusion in his study, Hermann Rauschnings "Gesprache mit Hitler" als Geschichtsquelle (Opladen, 1972) is a well-balanced one: ". . . although the words attributed to Hitler by Rauschning cannot be valued as being authentic in the sense they were recorded verbatim . . . they must be seen as an attempt at a composite summing-up. In this Rauschning undoubtedly produces something noteworthy." Quoted in J. S. Conway, "Hermann Rauschning as Historian and Opponent of Nazism," *Canadian Journal of History* 8 (1973): 67-78.

43. Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, p. 241. Note Blavatsky's statement in *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 439: "Mankind is obviously divided into God-informed men and lower human creatures."

44. Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, p. 242.

45. Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, pp. 339-94.

46. Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, p. 238.

47. Ibid., p. 234.

48. See Webb, *The Occult Establishment*, especially pp. 21-79.

49. On List, see the highly favorable biography by the secretary of the List Society, Johannes Baltzli, Guido von List (Leipzig, 1917). For a brief description, see Goldstein, "On Racism and Anti-Semitism in Occultism and Nazism," pp. 62-64, Webb, *The Occult Establishment*, pp. 279-80, and Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 73-75.

50. Besser, "Die Vorgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus im. neuen Licht," pp. 770- 72.

51. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky wrote of the occult significance of the swastika. See especially vol. 2, p. 103, where she characterized the swastika as the most sacred symbol in India. "It is the summary in a few lines of the work of creation,

or evolution as one should rather say." See also pp. 104-06, 586-91.

52. Mein Kampf, p. 497.

53. Baltzli, Guido von List, pp. 45-46. See also Mosse, "The Mystical Origins of National Socialism," pp. 85-87.

54. On Prana, see Mosse, "Mystical Origins," pp. 87-88.

55. Mein Kampf, p. 22.

56. The basic modern study of Liebenfels is Wilfried Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab*.

57. Ibid., p. 180.

58. Ibid., pp. 184-88.

59. Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, 1974), p. 36. See also George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975), p. 197.

60. Quoted in Webb, *The Occult Establishment*, p. 282.

61. Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab*, pp. 120-21.

62. Based on his research, Daim argues for the credibility of the story, *ibid.*, pp. 20- 21.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 23, also quoted in Goldstein, "On Racism and Anti-Semitism in Occultism and Nazism," p. 55.

64. Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab*, p. 12. Hitler's personal library also contained one of von Liebenfels's books and a book bearing the inscription: "An Adolf Hitler, meinem lieben Armanenbruder." See Robert G. L. Waite, "Adolf Hitler's Anti-Semitism: A Study in History and Psychoanalysis," in *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History*, ed. Benjamin Wolsman (New York, 1971), p. 197. On Hitler's relationship to Liebenfels, see also Fredrich Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler* (Munich, 1968), pp. 166-67.

65. Cornelius Tabori, *My Occult Diary* (London, 1951), p. 53.
66. See above, p. 234. George Mosse first identified this "Munich savant" as Edgar Dacque. See *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 306.
67. Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, "Zwischen Rilke und Hitler-Alfred Schuler," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 19 (1967): 338, 343. See also Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 76.
68. On the Germanen Order and the Thule Society, see George Franz, "Munich: Birthplace and Center of the National Socialist German Workers' Party," *The Journal of Modern History* 29 (Dec. 1957): 325-29; Phelps, "Before Hitler Came: Thule Society and Germanen Order"; Goldstein, "On Racism and Anti-Semitism in Occultism and Nazism," pp. 65-71; and Rudolf von Sebottendorf *Bevor Hitler kam* (Munich, 1933), especially pp. 33-43.
69. *Ibid.*, dedication page.
70. See n. 34, above.
71. See above, p. 237, for List's preoccupation with runes. Sebottendorf believed that "a vast amount of Aryan wisdom" could be found in the teachings of alchemists, Rosicrucians, and medieval masonic guilds. Sebottendorf, *Bevor Hitler kam*, p. 22. On Sebottendorf's occultism, see Ellic Howe, *Urania's Children: The Strange World of the Astrologers* (London, 1967), pp. 86-87.
72. Quoted in Webb, *The Occult Establishment*, p. 297.

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